PPG Meeting 26.4.21

Zoom meeting attendees: SG, CG, JH, MP, CO, NJ

1. COVID Vaccine – NJ updated the group on the current situation regarding the COVID Vaccine – in addition to clinically vulnerable patients, those aged over 40 have now been invited. Saxonbrook is now on the National Booking Service.
2. eConsult – NJ asked for opinions on a new online service that may be trialled. It would enable patients to seek medical advice or ask non-clinical questions via a digital platform that could be reached from the website. Patients using the service would be told that there is a 3 day turnaround time for a response. The information submitted would be passed to the appropriate GP/clinician or non-clinical staff member by a trained administrator. Discussion followed regarding the safety of a 3 day wait (agreed that patients needed to take responsibility about this being the best mode of contacting the GP) and the transmission of information by and administrator (agreed that the administrator would not be interpreting any information contained, merely filing the “document” and highlighting its existence to the relevant member of staff). General consensus that it would not be appropriate for all but may be a positive add-on communication stream for certain demographics of patients.
3. MP – raised various concerns about signposting by non-clinical members of staff including (but not limited to) issues about confidentiality, training to obtain medical history, access to medical records. NJ explained that receptionists are, in her opinion, Healthcare Professionals, and they receive regular training in regard to signposting patients to the correct services. This is vital in order to manage the availability of appointments in times of a demand that exceeds capacity. Receptionists do have access to patient’s records in order to perform their tasks but are bound by all data security and patient confidentiality legislation, in the same way that a Nurse or GP is. Patients who do not wish to tell the receptionist what the nature of their problem is should book an appointment via our website. It was noted that PPG members state that they don’t always know who they are talking to – NJ to take back to reception team.
4. JH – started a discussion regarding cancer diagnosis and the potential adverse effect on this of the pandemic. NJ explained that since mid-2020 it had been a target of Primary Care Networks to promote early cancer diagnosis and consequently, we send a text to all patients who fail to return bowel screening samples and who don’t attend for mammography. We also work (as we have always done) closely with the Cervical Screening service to send reminder invitations to patients who are due their smear test. Although it is reported by NHSE that there was something of a “lull” in two week referrals (those referrals that are to rule out cancer) at the start of the pandemic, at Furnace Green Surgery we referred the same number of patients via this route in 2020 as we had in 2019 (264 referrals vs 262). National media campaigns advising patients to speak to their GP if they have any worrying symptoms are helping to encourage patients to contact the surgery despite the COVID Crisis.
5. JH – asked when surgery services will return to “normal” and asked whether there will be a New Normal. NJ explained that we regularly review the appointment system in light of changes caused by the Pandemic but that at the moment there was no plan to move away from the telephone appointment and triage system. This way of working has provided lots of opportunities to learn and streamline services, and it is likely that an increased use of telephone appointments will feature in ongoing service provision. We also discussed video consultations which have been available since the beginning of the lockdown. Where appropriate, a GP will ask a patient to use this function but it is more often appropriate to ask a patient for a photo rather than an actual video call.
6. NJ – registrations were discussed as there has been an increase in patient’s disappointment with the surgery because all those who move out of the Furnace Green catchment area are now required to re-register. This is because we are close approaching a time when the list would again be capped, and to continue to allow those out of area patients to remain registered means that patients moving into the local area may not be registered with us. Those patients who moved out of area before December 2019 are allowed to remain on the surgery list, but since that date, moving to a new address outside of our boundary leads to deduction.

Date of next meeting: TBC